

Patent Application of Bruce H Potter
for
Preliminary Bonus Feature for Electronic Casino Games

This is a Continuation-In-Part of and claims benefit to Application Ser. No. PCT/US01/12629, filed 04/18/2001, and is also based on and is a Continuation-In-Part of Application Ser. No. 09/837,240, filed 04/18/2001, and is also based on and is a Continuation-In-Part of Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/197,997, filed April 18, 2000. The disclosure of each of these earlier applications is incorporated herein by this reference, with each of these earlier applications being commonly owned with this application.

Background

Many electronic casino games such as slot machines and video poker comprise a primary game and one or more bonus rounds. The primary games typically enable a player to generate one or more symbols using a symbol generator. The traditional symbol generator is a set of reels, where each reel displays a plurality of symbols, or a deck of cards. If the player reaches a predetermined combination of symbols, the player wins a value. In addition, if the player reaches a bonus feature triggering event, the electronic casino game advances the player to a bonus round where the player can accumulate additional values. The traditional bonus triggering event occurs when the player reaches a predetermined combination of symbols on a plurality of reels, or a winning combination of cards.

The existing primary electronic casino games provide players with values and bonus triggering events based upon symbols that a player reaches using a symbol generator during the normal play of the primary electronic casino games in order to reach a bonus game or receive a bonus award. Currently, the primary electronic casino games do not include a bonus triggering event that occurs prior to the normal play of the primary electronic casino games.

US Patent No. 6,312,334 (to Yoseloff) discloses a video gaming system wherein two, or more different games are played. In this system, the player wagers to play the primary electronic casino game until a certain predetermined winning combination is achieved. Once the player has reached the predetermined condition, only then can the player be allowed to wager any or all of the winnings from the predetermined winning combination on the second part of the game. There is no bonus feature that is provided prior the play of the primary game.

A bonus feature that is triggered prior the outcome of the primary electronic casino game would increase player enjoyment and excitement, by increasing the potential win amount of the primary electronic casino game.

Objects and Advantages

It is an advantage of the present invention that providing a preliminary bonus feature that adjusts the primary game wager enables the game manufacturer to promote and/or display a higher maximum win on the slot glass.

It is an object of the present invention to surprise electronic casino game players with a new method of receiving a bonus that takes place prior to the outcome of the primary game.

It is an advantage of the present invention to afford players' an opportunity to win even higher payouts in the primary game, due to the preliminary bonus feature, therefore keeping the players playing at the electronic casino games that provide a preliminary bonus feature.

It is an advantage of the present invention that players will experience heightened excitement during play of the primary casino game when they win or are awarded the bonus feature, because the player will have an increased desire to win the primary game after being awarded a win in the primary bonus feature.

It is an object of the present invention to update and provide interesting new bonus features to electronic casino games, because players demand new bonus games.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 -- Shows a perspective view of a game machine that could be useful for the present invention.

Reference Numerals

22	Rotatable Reels
24	Additional Reel
28	Coin Slot
29	Bill Validator
30	"Bet One" Button
32	"Bet Max" Button
34	"Spin Reels" Button
36	"Cash Out" Button
38	Coin Payout Opening
40	Pay Table Area
42	Coin Receiving Tray
44	Payline
46	Bonus Pay Area

Summary

The present invention is novel to the field of Casino Games, wherein a preliminary bonus feature is added to a primary casino game. The preliminary bonus feature of the present invention would take place prior to the outcome of the primary game. There would be a random chance, based upon a predetermined probability, that the preliminary bonus feature would be triggered before the outcome of the primary casino game is determined. The player would

be notified of the bonus award and the bonus would be added to the game wager and applied to the current round of the primary casino game, thus potentially increasing the amount won by the player, and having a beneficial effect on the outcome of the primary casino game.

One embodiment of the present invention adds the preliminary bonus feature to the primary casino games that are played on video slot machines. The player places a wager to participate in a video slot machine game; upon starting the round of the video slot machine game, there is a random chance that the preliminary bonus feature will be triggered. Once the preliminary bonus feature is triggered, the video screen will display a number of symbols, each of these symbols having a hidden multiplier attached to it, wherein one or more of the symbols could have a multiplier of one (1) and none of the symbols have a multiplier of less than one (1). The player selects a symbol and the multiplier attached to that symbol will be applied to the wager that the player placed to participate in the video slot machine game, and the current round of the video slot machine game will begin as if the player had originally placed the increased wager.

Alternately, the bonus feature of the present invention could be implemented wherein the player will not be given any symbols to choose from. The player places a wager to participate in the video slot machine game; upon starting the round of the video slot machine game, there is a random chance that the bonus feature will be triggered. Once the preliminary bonus feature is triggered, the player would be notified that a multiplier of more than one (1) has been applied to their wager for this round of the video slot machine game, and the current round of the video slot machine game will begin as if the player had originally placed the increased wager.

Further embodiments of the present invention add the preliminary bonus feature to video poker. As with the above-described embodiments, the player would place a wager to participate in the primary game of video poker. Once the wager is received, there would be a random chance that the

preliminary bonus feature would be triggered. Once the preliminary bonus feature is triggered the player would be shown a number of cards face down, the player would choose a card and the primary game wager would be increased based upon a predetermined pay-table. For example, cards two (2) through seven (7) could have a multiplier of one (1), eight (8) through King could have a multiplier of two (2), and Aces could have a multiplier of three (3). Alternately a specific card could be assigned a higher multiplier; for example the Ace of Spades, or a Joker could have a multiplier of five (5). Once the player has selected a card, the multiplier is applied to the game wager and the video poker game will begin as if the player had originally placed the increased wager.

Alternately, the preliminary bonus feature of the present invention could be added to a primary casino game wherein winning the preliminary bonus feature does not effect the game wager, but instead increases the pay-table of the primary casino game. For example, a reel slot machine could provide an extra reel that would spin only if the preliminary bonus feature of the present invention is triggered, and the bonus award could be awarded as follows: If the extra reel lands on a "win" symbol, the player would be notified that a bonus pay-table will be activated to determine the outcome of the primary casino game. The bonus pay-table will provide equal or higher payouts for all pay combinations on all other pay-tables, and will include at least one increased payout, and/or a combination of symbols that will pay only on the bonus pay-table. It would be preferred for this embodiment to not allow the preliminary bonus feature to be triggered unless the player has placed the maximum wager (Max Coin). This method could also be implemented wherein all payouts on the pay-table would be doubled, which has the same effect as applying a multiplier of two (2) to the game wager.

The above-summarised embodiments show some of the methods by which the preliminary bonus feature of the present invention could be added to a primary casino game. There are many ways that the preliminary bonus feature of the present invention could be played, for example the video poker method

could be implemented wherein the player would not be given any cards or symbols to choose from, and once the preliminary bonus feature is triggered the player could be moved to an enhanced pay-table, and the bonus may not be triggered unless the player has wagered Max Coin.

The preliminary bonus feature of the present invention is added to primary casino games in a way wherein the preliminary bonus feature occurs each round of the electronic casino game that it is added to. The player places a game wager on the electronic casino game with the possibility that the bonus feature will be triggered. The player is actually placing a wager directly in the bonus feature, however if the bonus feature is not triggered it has the same effect as the player being paid a multiplier of one (1).

Detailed Description

The present invention discloses a preliminary bonus feature that is novel in the field of wagering games, wherein a preliminary bonus feature that is completed prior to the outcome of a primary casino game can be added to a primary casino game. As shown in **Fig. 2**, the preliminary bonus feature of the present invention is added to a reel slot machine as the primary game. The casino game machine shown in **Fig. 2** comprises three same, or somewhat similar rotatable reels **22**, which comprise a variety of symbols, the viewable portion of which has five of a payline **44** each of which is directed across all three rotatable reels **22**, and an additional reel **24**, which comprises symbols that are discernable different from the symbols depicted upon rotatable reels **22**, wherein each symbol has a predetermined multiplier of at least one (1) associated with it, a stop position is designated by a bonus pay area **46**. A plurality of winning combinations associated with the primary game is displayed within a pay table area **40**. A player inserts money into the casino game machine either by inserting coins into a coin slot **28**, or by inserting paper money into a bill validator **29**. All money that is inserted into the casino game machine is held in the casino game machine as credits. The player can wager these

credits by pressing a "Bet One" button **30**, which will cause one held credit to be wagered on the primary casino game, or by pressing a "Bet Max" button **32**, which will wager the maximum amount that can be wagered on the primary casino game from the credits. After the player has wagered the desired amount, the player starts the casino game by pressing a "Spin Reels" button **34**, and there would be a predetermined chance that the preliminary bonus feature would be triggered. When the preliminary bonus feature is triggered, additional reel **24** would begin to spin. When additional reel **24** stops, the multiplier associated with the symbol viewable in bonus pay area **46** is applied to the players' wager, or the pay-table displayed within a pay-table area **40** could be modified by increasing the payouts. Upon completion of the preliminary bonus feature rotatable reels **22** will spin and if a winning combination of symbols are lined up along any of payline **44**, the player will receive the payout as defined by the pay-table displayed within pay-table area **40**, and the credits won would be added to the amount held in the game machine as credits. Alternately, the preliminary bonus feature, when triggered, could begin shortly after rotatable reels **22** begin to spin, or even after some, but not all, of rotatable reels **22** have stopped.

The preliminary bonus feature of the present invention does not require that any bonus game be present, or played; the machine could simply notify the player automatically that their wager has been increased automatically, or that the pay-table displayed within pay table area **40** has been modified, thereby increasing the payouts for the primary game. This preliminary bonus feature, as disclosed, adds a high level of excitement to a primary casino game, since the player has an increased potential win with no added potential loss, while the speed of the primary game remains virtually unchanged. It is possible to increase the players' wager by less than 100%. For example, a winning bonus could change the value of the game wager by 50% changing all .50¢ wagers into .75¢ wagers, or be doubling only certain payouts on that the pay-table displayed within pay table area **40**.

Further embodiments of the present invention add the preliminary bonus feature to the primary games played on the video slot machine platform. Due to the video graphical interface of this platform, variations of the present invention are practically endless. A specific variation would involve engaging the player in a short bonus game, once the preliminary bonus feature has been triggered. This short bonus game would display on the video screen a number of symbols, animated characters, icons, or etc. that could be related to the theme of the primary game, and each of the symbols would have a hidden multiplier of at least one (1) associated with it. The player would select one of the symbols and the associated multiplier would be applied to the primary game wager. Optionally, the bonus feature could display all of the hidden multipliers once the player has made a selection. The primary game would then begin using the adjusted wager as the primary game wager.

The preliminary bonus feature of the present invention could also be added to the game of video poker as the primary game. Preferably, the preliminary bonus feature should only be in play for video poker players that wager Max Coin; this will provide an incentive for players to wager Max Coin. Due to the speed of play that video poker players are accustomed to, engaging the player in a short bonus game prior to a round, or hand, of video poker would not be advisable. However notifying a player that has wagered Max Coin, with a short series of dings, or an unobtrusive blinking, or the like, that the preliminary bonus feature has triggered and the player is now playing on a bonus pay-table wherein all payouts of Full House or better are increased by 25% over the Max Coin pay-table would enhance the game of video poker and increase the excitement of the electronic casino game.

Many casino table games have versions that have been implemented into the electronic gaming format. For example, the game of Blackjack has been put into single and multi-player video machines. The preliminary bonus feature of the present invention could be added to the primary game of Blackjack wherein the player would be try to guess the color (Red, or Black) or suit

(Spades, Hearts, Diamonds, or Clubs) of the dealers' up card. This could require that an additional wager be placed on preliminary bonus feature that would be placed at the same time as the primary game wager. The color would be guessed as the preliminary bonus feature wager is placed, if the player correctly guesses the color of the dealers' up card the amount of the preliminary bonus feature wager would be doubled and added to the primary game wager. This game could also be implemented wherein the player is wagering on the rank, or color combination of their own hand, another players hand, some combination of the cards in play with payouts being provided based on the rarity of their occurrence.

Still further versions of the preliminary bonus feature could be added to primary casino games that are linked and have large progressive jackpots, wherein the progressive jackpot would only be obtainable when the preliminary bonus feature has been triggered. For example, if the largest payout on a particular machine is 10,000 coins for achieving three "cherry" symbols on one of payline **44**, this same combination could pay a much higher amount, a progressive jackpot, if the preliminary bonus feature has been triggered that round.

Many different variables exist in the field of electronic casino games, and therefore there are many different embodiments of the present invention. For example, the preliminary bonus feature could be added to a reel slot machine by utilizing a small video screen, a series of bonus buttons could be added to a video slot machine, and each of these buttons could have a hidden multiplier placed on them when the preliminary bonus feature has been triggered. The present invention comprises a preliminary bonus feature wherein the outcome of the preliminary bonus feature is determined prior to determining the outcome of the primary game, and the outcome of the primary game cannot be adversely affected when the preliminary bonus feature has been triggered.

Conclusions, Ramifications, and Scope

Accordingly, it is apparent that the present invention provides a method whereby a preliminary bonus feature that increases the excitement level due to the enhanced possible win, can be added to an primary casino game. Additionally, the novelty of playing a preliminary bonus game before a primary casino game begins quickly surprises players, because all other bonus events require that a predetermined condition be met before any bonus feature is provided. Finally, the present invention could be implemented for use on a personal computer platform, whether distributed in a boxed software package, or over an intranet, the internet, or an internet wagering site.

Although the description above contains many specificities, these should not be construed as limiting the scope of the invention but as merely providing illustrations of some of the presently preferred embodiments of this invention. Thus the scope of the invention should be determined by the appended claims and their legal equivalents, rather than by the examples given.